



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>

848

V940

H9d1

tP27

1899

A

726,309

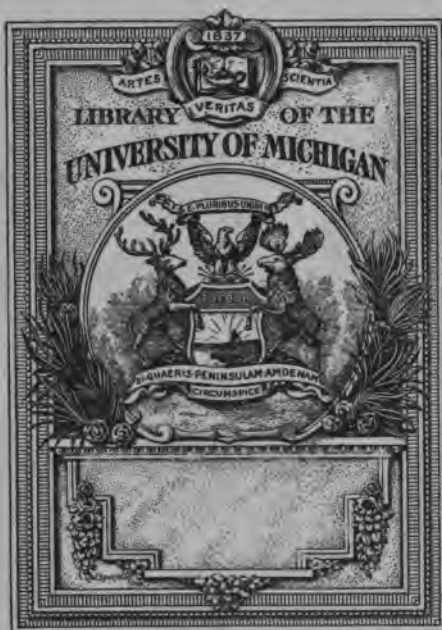
V940 H

Hugo, Victor

Oration on Voltaire,
on the 100th anniversary
of his death.

1899

University of Michigan







565 maroon *Left with Hugo*
Feb 2, 1910

Victor Hugo's
Oration
On Voltaire



VICTOR HUGO'S

90583

Oration on Voltaire

DELIVERED AT PARIS

May 30, 1878

THE ONE HUNDREDTH ANNIVERSARY OF HIS DEATH

Translated by

JAMES PARTON

Author of "The Life of Voltaire"

Privately Printed

PORTLAND, ME
SMITH & SALK, PRINTERS
1899

NEWBURYPORT, MASS., Feb. 12, 1883.

MY DEAR FRIEND:—I send Victor Hugo's wonderful Discourse, as per request, and shall be pleased to see it printed for the first time in the English language. Of all the things that I was obliged to leave out of my Life of Voltaire from want of room, I lamented most the absence of this prodigious and salutary utterance. I do believe that the pacific attitude of the French nation, and the pacific tone of the French press, during the late Egyptian crisis, was due, in a great measure, to the influence of this high argument for peace and brotherly co-operation.

Print it, my dear MAN; print it in your valuable paper. Circulate it. Spread it abroad over the land. No man can read it without feeling the vast absurdity of human beings doing anything but to pity, love, and help one another.

Ever Yours,

JAMES PARTON.

5
:
7
1

INTRODUCTION.

THIS oration of Victor Hugo brings out in clear contrast a strange contradiction. Our progress is but an evolution from and at the same time it is a revolt against the past.

“The thoughts of men are widened by the process of the suns.”

“Yet the mighty dead still rule us from their urns.”

This apparent contradiction exists because the peoples are not as yet familiar with the law of evolution in social progress. The picture of a child imprisoned within the ribs of a skeleton is the picture of the world that many have for want of this conception of time and growth. They revolt against the order of time, because time is not solid, and is only visible to the eye of the intellect.

Therefore such revolts have been necessary. They are the great revolutions and social volcanoes of which Paris has been the favorite crater in Europe. Hugo's great soul has seized the lights and shadows of the great catastrophes of the last century, and, as poet, orator, and painter, has made their meaning visible to mankind forever in his wonderful oration.

It is a warning, a consecration, and a hope. It tells that progress is the only condition of human safety. It consecrates the noble Voltaire who made its conditions possible. It is a prophecy of hope and peace in evolution under the light of knowledge and love. It is the inspiration of every liberated soul to realize this aspiration for "peace on earth and good will to men," which rises immeasurably higher than any Christian myth ever dreamed.

The magnificent word painting of this oration and its inspiration is one of the highest points humanity has ever reached. We are at a loss to find anything superior to it. Compare with it the great orations of Pericles, Demosthenes, Cicero, Chatham, Mirabeau, Henry, Webster, or that peerless pearl, the consecration of the dead at Gettysburg, of Abraham Lincoln, and you will feel that those mighty voices were limited by local and temporary interests and feelings.

Hugo has spoken for all the races of earth and for all time. He has realized to the heart and eye humanity's heaven of progress sustained by all of the powers of the good in the human soul. To those who can but catch a glimpse of its mighty meaning it will be a treasure forever. No one can read and understand it and be the same person he was before.

T. B. W.

COL. THOMAS WENTWORTH HIGGINSON was present when the oration was delivered, and the following is his account of it, taken from his "Cheerful Yesterdays":

"His oration on Voltaire—since translated by Mr. James Parton—was delivered from notes, written in an immense hand on sheets twice as large as any foolscap paper I had ever seen; and he read from these without glasses. He was at this time seventy-six, but looked ten years younger.

"He stood behind two great sconces, each holding six candles; above these appeared his strong white-bearded face, and above him rose Voltaire and his laurel wreath. He used much gesture, and in impassioned moments waved his arm above his head, the fingers apart and trembling with emotion. Sometimes he clapped one hand to his head as if to tear out some of his white hairs, though this hardly seemed, at the moment, melodramatic.

"His voice was vigorous, and yet from some defect of utterance, I lost more of what he said than in case of the other speakers. Others around me made the same complaint. His delivery, however, was as characteristic as his literary style, and quite in keeping with it, being a series of brilliant detached points. It must be a stimulating thing, indeed, to speak to a French audience,—to men

who give sighs of delight over a fine phrase, and shouts of enthusiasm over a great thought.

“The most striking part of Hugo’s address, to my mind, was his defense of the smile of Voltaire, and his turning of the enthusiasm for the pending exposition into an appeal for international peace. Never was there a more powerful picture than his sketch of ‘that frightful international exposition called a field of battle.’ ”

VICTOR HUGO'S

Oration on Voltaire.

DELIVERED AT PARIS, MAY 30, 1878, THE HUNDREDTH
ANNIVERSARY OF VOLTAIRE'S DEATH.

[Translated by James Parton.]

A HUNDRED years ago to-day a man died. He died immortal. He departed laden with years, laden with works, laden with the most illustrious and the most fearful of responsibilities, the responsibility of the human conscience informed and rectified. He went cursed and blessed, cursed by the past, blessed by the future; and these, gentlemen, are the two superb forms of glory. On his death bed he had, on the one hand, the acclaim of contemporaries and of posterity; on the other, that triumph of hooting and of hate which the implacable past bestows upon those who have combatted it. He was more than a man; he was an age. He had exercised a function and fulfilled a mission. He had been evidently chosen for the work which he had done, by the supreme will, which manifests itself as visibly in the laws of destiny as in the laws of nature.

The eighty-four years which this man lived occupy the interval that separates the monarchy at its apogee from the revolution in its dawn. When he was born Louis XIV still reigned, when he died Louis XVI reigned already; so that his cradle could see the last rays of the great throne, and his coffin the first gleams from the great abyss. [Applause.]

Before going further, let us come to an understanding, gentlemen, upon the word abyss. There are good abysses: such are the abysses in which evil is engulfed. [Bravo.]

Gentlemen, since I have interrupted myself, allow me to complete my thought. No word imprudent or unsound will be pronounced here. We are here to perform an act of civilization. We are here to make affirmation of progress, to pay respect to philosophers for the benefits of philosophy, to bring to the eighteenth century the testimony of the nineteenth, to honor magnanimous combatants and good servants, to felicitate the noble effort of peoples, industry, science, the valiant march in advance, the toil to cement human concord; in one word, to glorify peace, that sublime, universal desire. Peace is the virtue of civilization; war is its crime. [Applause.] We are here, at this grand moment, in this solemn hour, to bow religiously before the moral law, and to say to the world, which hears France, this: There is only one power, conscience

in the service of justice; and there is only one glory, genius in the service of truth. [Movement.] That said, I continue.

Before the revolution, gentlemen, the social structure was this :

At the base, the people ;

Above the people, religion represented by the clergy ;

By the side of religion, justice represented by the magistracy.

And, at that period of human society, what was the people? It was ignorance. What was religion? It was intolerance. And what was justice? It was injustice. Am I going too far in my words? Judge.

I will confine myself to the citation of two facts, but decisive.

At Toulouse, October 13, 1761, there was found in the lower story of a house, a young man hanged. The crowd gathered, the clergy fulminated, the magistracy investigated. It was a suicide; they made of it an assassination. In what interest? In the interest of religion. And who was accused? The father. He was a Huguenot, and he wished to hinder his son from becoming a Catholic. There was here a moral monstrosity and a material impossibility; no matter! This father had killed his son; this old man had hanged this young man.

Justice travailed, and this was the result. On the month of March, 1762, a man with white hair, Jean Calas, was conducted to a public place, stripped naked, stretched upon a wheel, the members bound upon it, the head hanging. Three men are there upon a scaffold, a magistrate, named David, charged to superintend the punishment, a priest to hold the crucifix, and the executioner with a bar of iron in his hand. The patient, stupefied and terrible, regards not the priest, and looks at the executioner. The executioner lifts the bar of iron, and breaks one of his arms. The victim groans and swoons. The magistrate comes forward; they make the condemned inhale salts; he returns to life. Then another stroke of the bar; another groan. Calas loses consciousness; they revive him, and the executioner begins again; and, as each limb before being broken in two places receives two blows, that makes eight punishments. After the eighth swooning the priest offers him the crucifix to kiss; Calas turns away his head, and the executioner gives him the *coup de grace*; that is to say, crushes in his chest with the thick end of the bar of iron. So died Jean Calas.

That lasted two hours. After his death the evidence of the suicide came to light. But an assassination had been committed. By whom? By the judges. [Great sensation. Applause.]

FIN

Another fact. After the old man, the young man. Three years later, in 1765, at Abbeville, the day after a night of storm and high wind, there was found upon the pavement of a bridge an old crucifix of worm-eaten wood, which for three centuries had been fastened to the parapet. Who had thrown down this crucifix? Who committed this sacrilege? It is not known. Perhaps a passer-by. Perhaps the wind. Who is the guilty one? The Bishop of Amiens launches a *monitoire*. Note what a *monitoire* was: it was an order to all the faithful, on pain of hell, to declare what they knew or believed they knew of such or such a fact; a murderous injunction, when addressed by fanaticism to ignorance. The *monitoire* of the Bishop of Amiens does its work; the town gossip assumes the character of the crime charged. Justice discovers, or believes it discovers, that on the night when the crucifix was thrown down, two men, two officers, one named La Barre, the other D'Etallonde, passed over the bridge of Abbeville, that they were drunk, and that they sang a guard-room song. The tribunal was the Seneschalcy of Abbeville. The Seneschalcy of Abbeville was equivalent to the court of the Capitouls of Toulouse. It was not less just. Two orders for arrest were issued. D'Etallonde escaped, La Barre was taken. Him they delivered to judicial examination. He denied having crossed the bridge;

he confessed to having sung the song. The Seneschalcy of Abbeville condemned him; he appealed to the Parliament of Paris. He was conducted to Paris; the sentence was found good and confirmed. He was conducted back to Abbeville in chains. I abridge. The monstrous hour arrives. They begin by subjecting the Chevalier de La Barre to the torture, ordinary and extraordinary, to make him reveal his accomplices. Accomplices in what? In having crossed a bridge and sung a song. During the torture one of his knees was broken; his confessor, on hearing the bones crack, fainted away. The next day, June 5, 1766, La Barre was drawn to the great square of Abbeville, where flamed a penitential fire; the sentence was read to La Barre; then they cut off one of his hands; then they tore out his tongue with iron pincers; then, in mercy, his head was cut off and thrown into the fire. So died the Chevalier de La Barre. He was nineteen years of age. [Long and profound sensation.]

Then, O Voltaire! thou didst utter a cry of horror, and it will be thine eternal glory! [Thunders of applause.]

Then didst thou enter upon the appalling trial of the past; thou didst plead, against tyrants and monsters, the cause of the human race, and thou didst gain it. Great man, blessed be thou forever! [Renewed applause.]

Gentlemen, the frightful things which I have recalled were accomplished in the midst of a polite society; its life was gay and light; people went and came; they looked neither above nor below themselves; their indifference had become carelessness; graceful poets, Saint Aulaire, Boufflers, Gentil-Bernard, composed pretty verses; the court was all festival; Versailles was brilliant; Paris ignored what was passing; and then it was that, through religious ferocity, the judges made an old man die upon the wheel, and the priests tore out a child's tongue for a song. [Vivid emotion. Applause.]

In the presence of this society, frivolous and dismal, Voltaire alone, having before his eyes those united forces, the court, the nobility, capital; that unconscious power, the blind multitude; that terrible magistracy, so severe to subjects, so docile to the master, crushing and flattering, kneeling upon the people before the king [Bravo!]; ~~that clergy,~~ vile *mélange* of hypocrisy and fanaticism; Voltaire alone, I repeat, declared war against that coalition of all the social iniquities, against that enormous and terrible world, and he accepted battle with it. And what was his weapon? That which has the lightness of the wind and the power of the thunder-bolt. A pen. [Applause.]

With that weapon he fought; with that weapon he conquered.

Gentlemen, let us salute that memory.

Voltaire conquered ; Voltaire waged the splendid kind of warfare, the war of one alone against all ; that is to say, the grand warfare. The war of thought against matter, the war of reason against prejudice, the war of the just against the unjust, the war for the oppressed against the oppressor, the war of goodness, the war of kindness. He had the tenderness of a woman and the wrath of a hero. He was a great mind, and an immense heart. [Bravos.]

He conquered the old code and the old dogma. He conquered the feudal lord, the gothic judge, the Roman priest. He raised the populace to the dignity of people. He taught, pacificated, and civilized. He fought for Sirven and Montbailly, as for Calas and La Barre ; he accepted all the menaces, all the outrages, all the persecutions, calumny, and exile. He was indefatigable and immovable. He conquered violence by a smile, despotism by sarcasm, infallibility by irony, obstinacy by perseverance, ignorance by truth.

I have just pronounced the word *smile*. I pause at it. Smile ! It is Voltaire.

Let us say it, gentlemen, pacification (*apaise-ment* ?) is the great side of the philosopher : in Voltaire the equilibrium always re-establishes itself at last. Whatever may be his just wrath, it passes, and the irritated

Voltaire always gives place to the Voltaire calmed. Then in that profound eye the SMILE appears.

That smile is wisdom. That smile, I repeat, is Voltaire. That smile sometimes becomes laughter, but the philosophic sadness tempers it. Toward the strong, it is mockery; toward the weak it is a caress. It disquiets the oppressor, and reassures the oppressed. Against the great, it is raillery; for the little, it is pity. Ah, let us be moved by that smile! It had in it the rays of the dawn. It illuminated the true, the just, the good, and what there is of worthy in the useful. It lighted up the interior of superstitions. Those ugly things it is salutary to see; he has shown them. Luminous, that smile was fruitful also. The new society, the desire for equality and concession, and that beginning of fraternity which called itself tolerance, reciprocal good-will, the just accord of men and rights, reason recognized as the supreme law, the annihilation of prejudices and fixed opinions, the serenity of souls, the spirit of indulgence and of pardon, harmony, peace—behold what has come from that great smile!

On the day—very near, without any doubt—when the identity of wisdom and clemency will be recognized, the day when the amnesty will be proclaimed, I affirm it, up there, in the stars, Voltaire will smile. [Triple salvo of applause. Cries, *Vive l'amnestie!*]



Gentlemen, between two servants of Humanity, who appeared eighteen hundred years apart, there is a mysterious relation.

To combat Pharisaism; to unmask imposture; to overthrow tyrannies, usurpations, prejudices, falsehoods, superstitions; to demolish the temple in order to rebuild it, that is to say, to replace the false by the true; to attack a ferocious magistracy; to attack a sanguinary priesthood; to take a whip and drive the money-changers from the sanctuary; to reclaim the heritage of the disinherited; to protect the weak, the poor, the suffering, the overwhelmed, to struggle for the persecuted and oppressed,—that was the war of Jesus Christ! And who waged that war? It was Voltaire.

The completion of the evangelical work is the philosophical work; the spirit of meekness began, the spirit of tolerance continued. Let us say it with a sentiment of profound respect: JESUS WEPT; VOLTAIRE SMILED. Of that divine tear and of that human smile is composed the sweetness of the present civilization. [Prolonged applause.]

Did Voltaire always smile? No. He was often indignant. You remarked it in my first words.

Certainly, gentlemen, measure, reserve, proportion are reason's supreme law. We can say that moderation is the very respiration of the philosopher. The effort of the wise man ought to be to condense



into a sort of serene certainty all the approximations of which philosophy is composed. But at certain moments, the passion for the true rises powerful and violent, and it is within its right in so doing, like the stormy winds which purify. Never, I insist upon it, will any wise man shake those two august supports of social labor, justice and hope; and all will respect the judge if he is embodied justice, and all will venerate the priest if he represents hope. But if the magistracy calls itself torture, if the Church calls itself Inquisition, then Humanity looks them in the face, and says to the judge: I will none of thy law! and says to the priest: I will none of thy dogma! I will none of thy fire upon the earth and thy hell in the future! [Wild sensation. Prolonged applause.] Then philosophy rises in wrath, and arraigns the judge before justice, and the priest before God! [Redoubled applause.]

That is what Voltaire did. It was grand.

What Voltaire was, I have said; what his age was, I am about to say.

Gentlemen, great men rarely come alone; large trees seem larger when they dominate a forest; there they are at home. There was a forest of minds around Voltaire; that forest was the eighteenth century. Among those minds there were summits, Montesquieu, Buffon, Beaumarchais, and among others, two, the highest after Voltaire—

Rousseau and Diderot. Those thinkers taught men to reason; reasoning well leads to acting well; justness in the mind becomes justice in the heart. Those toilers for progress labored usefully. Buffon founded naturalism; Beaumarchais discovered, outside of Molière, a kind of comedy till then unknown, almost the social comedy; Montesquieu made in law some excavations so profound that he succeeded in exhuming the right. As to Rousseau, as to Diderot, let us pronounce those two names apart; Diderot, a vast intelligence, inquisitive, a tender heart, a thirst for justice, wished to give certain notions as the foundation of true ideas, and created the encyclopædia. Rousseau rendered to woman an admirable service, completing the mother by the nurse, placing near one another those two majesties of the cradle. Rousseau, a writer, eloquent and pathetic, a profound oratorical dreamer, often divined and proclaimed political truth; his ideal borders upon the real; he had the glory of being the first man in France who called himself citizen. The civic fibre vibrates in Rousseau; that which vibrates in Voltaire is the universal fibre. One can say that in the fruitful eighteenth century, Rousseau represented the people; Voltaire, still more vast, represented Man. Those powerful writers disappeared, but they left us their soul, the Revolution. [Applause.]

Yes, the French Revolution was their soul. It was their radiant manifestation. It came from them; we find them everywhere in that blest and superb catastrophe, which formed the conclusion of the past and the opening of the future. In that clear light, which is peculiar to revolutions, and which beyond causes permits us to perceive effects, and beyond the first plan the second, we see behind Danton Diderot, behind Robespierre Rousseau, and behind Mirabeau, Voltaire. These formed those.

Gentlemen, to sum up epochs, by giving them the names of men, to name ages, to make of them in some sort human personages, has only been done by three peoples, Greece, Italy, France. We say, the Age of Pericles, the Age of Augustus, the Age of Leo X, the Age of Louis XIV, the Age of Voltaire. These appellations have a great significance. This privilege of giving names to periods belonging exclusively to Greece, to Italy, and to France, is the highest mark of civilization. Until Voltaire, they were the names of the chiefs of states; Voltaire is more than the chief of a state; he is a chief of ideas; with Voltaire a new cycle begins. We feel that henceforth the supreme governmental power is to be thought. Civilization obeyed force; it will obey the ideal. It was the sceptre and the sword broken, to be replaced by the ray of light; that is

to say, authority transfigured into liberty. Henceforth, no other sovereignty than the law for the people, and the conscience for the individual. For each of us, the two aspects of progress separate themselves clearly, and they are these: to exercise one's right; that is to say, to be a man; to perform one's duty; that is to say, to be a citizen.

Such is the signification of that word, the Age of Voltaire; such is the meaning of that august event, the French Revolution.

The two memorable centuries which preceded the eighteenth, prepared for it; Rabelais warned royalty in Gargantua, and Molière warned the church in Tartuffe. Hatred of force and respect for right are visible in those two illustrious spirits.

Whoever says to-day *might makes right* performs an act of the Middle Ages, and speaks to men three hundred years behind their time. [Repeated applause.]

Gentlemen, the nineteenth century glorifies the eighteenth century. The eighteenth proposed, the nineteenth concludes. And my last word will be the declaration, tranquil, but inflexible, of progress.

The time has come. The right has found its formula: human federation.

To-day, force is called violence, and begins to be judged; war is arraigned. Civilization, upon the complaint of the human race, orders the trial, and

draws up the great criminal indictment of conquerors and captains. [Emotion.] This witness, History, is summoned. The reality appears. The factitious brilliancy is dissipated. In many cases, the hero is a species of assassin. [Applause.] The peoples begin to comprehend that increasing the magnitude of a crime cannot be its diminution; that, if to kill is a crime, to kill much cannot be an extenuating circumstance [Laughter and bravos.]; that, if to steal is a shame, to invade cannot be a glory [Repeated applause.]; that *Te Deums* do not count for much in this matter; that homicide is homicide; that bloodshed is bloodshed; that it serves nothing to call one's self Cæsar or Napoleon; and that in the eyes of the eternal God, the figure of a murderer is not changed because, instead of a gallows' cap, there is placed upon his head an emperor's crown. [Long continued acclamation. Triple salvo of applause.]

Ah! let us proclaim absolute truths. Let us dishonor war. No; glorious war does not exist. No; it is not good, and it is not useful, to make corpses. No; it cannot be that life travails for death. No; oh, mothers who surround me, it cannot be that war, the robber, should continue to take from you your children. No; it cannot be that women should bear children in pain, that men should be born, that people should plow and sow, that the

farmer should fertilize the fields, and the workmen enrich the city, that industry should produce marvels, that genius should produce prodigies, that the vast human activity should, in presence of the starry sky, multiply efforts and creations, all to result in that frightful international exposition which is called a field of battle! [Profound sensation. The whole audience rises and applauds the orator.]

The true field of battle, behold it here! It is this rendezvous of the masterpieces of human labor which Paris offers the world at this moment.*

The true victory is the victory of Paris. [Applause.]

Alas! we cannot hide it from ourselves, that the present hour, worthy as it is of admiration and respect, has still some mournful aspects; there are still shadows upon the horizon; the tragedy of the peoples is not finished; war, wicked war, is still there, and it has the audacity to lift its head in the midst of this august festival of peace. Princes, for two years past, obstinately adhere to a fatal misunderstanding; their discord forms an obstacle to our concord, and they are ill-inspired to condemn us to the statement of such a contrast.

Let this contrast lead us back to Voltaire. In

* The exposition of 1878 was then open in Paris.

the presence of menacing possibilities, let us be more pacific than ever. Let us turn toward that great death, toward that great life, toward that great spirit. Let us bend before the venerated tombs. Let us take counsel of him whose life, useful to men, was extinguished a hundred years ago, but whose work is immortal. Let us take counsel of the other power thinkers, the auxiliaries of this glorious Voltaire, of Jean Jacques, of Diderot, of Montesquieu. Let us give the word to those great voices. Let us stop the effusion of human blood. Enough! enough! despots. Ah! barbarism persists; very well, let civilization be indignant. Let the eighteenth century come to the help of the nineteenth. The philosophers, our predecessors, are the apostles of the true; let us invoke those illustrious shades; let them, before monarchies meditate wars, proclaim the right of man to life, the right of conscience to liberty, the sovereignty of reason, the holiness of labor, the beneficence of peace; and since night issues from the thrones, let the light come from the tombs. [Acclamations unanimous and prolonged. From all sides bursts the cry: "Vive Victor Hugo."]

THE CHOIR INVISIBLE.

BY GEORGE ELIOT.

O may I join the choir invisible
Of those immortal dead who live again
In minds made better by their presence: live
In pulses stirred to generosity,
In deeds of daring rectitude, in scorn
For miserable aims that end with self,
In thoughts sublime that pierce the night like stars,
And with their mild persistence urge man's search
To vaster issues.

So to live is heaven :
To make undying music in the world,
Breathing as beauteous order that controls
With growing sway the growing life of man.
So we inherit that sweet purity
For which we struggled, failed, and agonized
With widening retrospect that bred despair.
Rebellious flesh that would not be subdued,
A vicious parent shaming still its child
Poor anxious penitence, is quick dissolved ;
Its discords, quenched by meeting harmonies,
Die in the large and charitable air.
And all our rarer, better, truer self,
That sobbed religiously in yearning song,
That watched to ease the burthen of the world,
Laboriously tracing what must be,

And what may yet be better—saw within
A worthier image for the sanctuary,
And shaped it forth before the multitude
Divinely human, raising worship so
To higher reverence more mixed with love—
That better self shall live till human Time
Shall fold its eyelids, and the human sky
Be gathered like a scroll within the tomb
Unread for ever.

 This is life to come,
Which martyred men have made more glorious
For us who strive to follow. May I reach
That purest heaven, be to other souls
The cup of strength in some great agony,
Enkindle generous ardor, feed pure love,
Beget the smiles that have no cruelty—
Be the sweet presence of a good diffused,
And in diffusion ever more intense.
So shall I join the choir invisible
Whose music is the gladness of the world.





